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NAVY DIVERS TRAIN TO REMOVE HAZARDOUS ABANDONED FISHING GEAR

Seattle-area Navy divers are currently undergoing specialized training to learn a more efficient method of safely removing submerged derelict fishing nets. The training, conducted at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Dive Center in Sand Point and on actual sites of detected nets in area waters, will help the Navy better carry out the dangerous but critical task of net removal.

The divers are from Explosive Ordnance Disposal Mobile Unit 11 (EODMU-11) located on Naval Air Station Whidbey Island's Seaplane Base. EODMU-11 supports Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) operations throughout Commander, Navy Region Northwest's area of responsibility and fleet and battle group operations in Third, Fifth and Seventh Fleet Areas Of Responsibility.

Washington Department of Natural Resources divers, who are the local experts in derelict net removal, are imparting their knowledge to the Navy. This training matches enhanced military readiness to an environmental restoration need, benefiting multiple government agencies, ecosystems, commerce, marine navigation and national security. Also contributing to the efforts are Northwest Straits Commission, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Coastal America.

"The State of Washington DNR has developed an exceptionally efficient and cost-effective method for removing derelict fishing nets," said Rear Adm. XXXXXXX. "Navy Divers learning this innovative system will greatly aid them in more efficiently completing their mission requirements as these nets can be a major impairment to ship and troop water movements as well as to commercial fishing and the environment."

Abandoned, lost and discarded fishing nets can be found throughout the world's oceans, and are a particular concern in the waters of Puget Sound. Unless removed from the water, these derelict nets continue to attract, capture, and kill marine organisms until the gear is buried by sediment or dissolves, which could take hundreds of years. The gear also poses a severe threat to navigation by fowling props and rudders, damaging vessels and making them unable to maneuver. Furthermore, the gear is a hazard to divers, who can become entangled in the nets just as fish can.

"This is the perfect example of shared knowledge and skills benefiting everyone involved," said Tim Keeney, Deputy Assistant Secretary for oceans and atmosphere at NOAA. "Our nation benefits in two ways by having the Navy get valuable expertise that will be useful in security and navigation, and in the process, our ecosystems are safeguarded."

"Over the past three years, the Northwest Straits Commission has gained considerable experience removing harmful derelict fishing gear from Puget Sound," said

Tom Cowan, director of the commission. "We're pleased to pass on this knowledge to the Navy so this important restoration can be expanded to other regions."

The divers – already highly trained and experienced – will receive instruction and hands-on exposure. The training includes classroom instruction, an in-water lake demonstration of removal methods and two days of open water removal operations. In 2005, 60 Navy divers are scheduled to complete these courses.

MEODMU-11 is composed of six mobile and three shore EOD detachments, a medical/recompression chamber detachment and a deployable C4I cell. Each EOD detachment is trained to detect, identify, render safe and dispose of all types of explosives and explosive ordnance that pose a hazard to personnel or property on land or under water.

The Mobile Unit also provides support to the United States Secret Service for protection of the president, vice president, foreign heads of state and others as designated. EOD personnel are trained in scuba and mixed gas diving, demolition, helicopter insertion and extraction, small unit tactics and parachuting.